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POLICY ISSUES

STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The environmental situation in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report reviews the implementation of Governing Council decisions 17/31 of 21 May 1993, 18/11 of 26 May 1995 and 19/8 of 7 February 1997, by which the Executive Director was requested, inter alia, to update the report on the environmental situation in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories and to provide technical assistance in Palestinian institutional and self-capacity-building in the field of the environment.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

(a) Welcome the activities which the United Nations Environment Programme is undertaking in association with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories;

(b) Request the Executive Director to continue participating in the activities of the multilateral working groups of the Middle East peace process as well as the activities of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories in order to ensure that environmental concerns are given due priority.

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A. Activities undertaken by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) within the framework of the Middle East multilateral peace process

1. UNEP continues to participate in the activities of the Multilateral Working Group on Water Resources and the Multilateral Working Group on the Environment of the Middle East peace process.

2. Since the last meeting of the Governing Council, the working groups have not met. Pending the resumption of their meetings, UNEP has prepared a proposal for a training course on integrated environmental and economic assessment of water resources in the Middle East under the auspices of the Regional Training Programme organized by the Multilateral Working Group on Water Resources.

B. Activities associated with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO)

3. UNEP participated in the fourth inter-agency meeting organized by UNSCO in Gaza on 2 and 3 July 1997 to coordinate United Nations assistance to the Palestinian people. UNEP is involved in the health and infrastructure working groups of these meetings and also gives general advice on environmental aspects of sustainable development.

4. Through the joint UNEP/UNCHS Sustainable Cities Programme, a Preparatory Assistance Project for Environmental Planning and Management Support to Gaza Municipality was developed and submitted to UNDP for co-funding. The objectives are to prepare an environmental profile of Gaza City focused on priority areas, draft a long-term programme document, and prepare and support start-up activities.

C. Update of the report on the state of the environment

5. In addition to specific environmental assessment activities already reported on, undertaken under the auspices of bilateral projects, including the Gaza Environmental Profile completed by the Palestinian Authority with financial assistance from the Government of the Netherlands, and a report on regional environmental cooperation and development options published by the Government of Israel, the Applied Research Institute in Jerusalem published a report in 1997 on the state of the environment in the West Bank.

6. In order to avoid duplication and reduce costs, UNEP has prepared an updated report on the environmental situation in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, drawing relevant information from the above-mentioned environmental assessment reports (UNEP/GC.20/INF/12).

D. Provision of technical assistance and self-capacity-building

7. UNEP has provided the Palestinian Environmental Authority with technical assistance for capacity-building consisting of advisory services on

environmental issues and environmental policy matters, as well as provision of scholarships to enable Palestinian experts to attend training courses, technical meetings and workshops in various environmental areas.

8. Mr. Salem El-Kourd, Director of International Cooperation in the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of the Palestinian Authority, participated in a training programme in environmental law and institutions organized by UNEP in Nairobi from 22 September to 9 October 1997.

9. At the invitation of UNEP and UNCHS, Mr. Awn Shawa, Mayor of Gaza Municipality, and Mr. Ayed Abu Ramadan, his assistant, participated in the second annual meeting of the Sustainable Cities Programme, held in Shenyang, China, from 30 September to 4 October 1997, as well as in the Urban Environment Forum organized in Shanghai, China, from 6 to 8 October 1997.

10. Representatives from the Palestinian Authority participated in various meetings and workshops organized by UNEP's Regional Office for West Asia, including an Expert Group Meeting on Non-conventional Water Resources and Appropriate Technologies for the Management of Underground Water (Bahrain, October 1997), and two workshops on urban waste management and medical waste management, (Bahrain, November-December 1997).

11. Within the context of United Nations-wide inter-agency efforts to support the Palestinian Authority, the UNEP secretariat intends to send a mission during the first half of 1999 to assist the Palestinian Authority in the assessment of needs in the field of the environment.